

**ABSTRACT**

The invention provides an improved method and system for processing mail items on bar code sorting machines. Such a method includes the steps of scanning a surface of each mail piece with at least one imaging camera to obtain at least one image of the surface  
5 represented by image data, analyzing the image data to locate a bar code in the image, and analyzing the bar code to recognize a first destination code. If the first destination code meets predetermined criteria, then the mail piece is processed further in a manner dependent on the first destination code. If the first destination code cannot be recognized or fails to meet the predetermined criteria, the image data is analyzed to locate destination  
10 address lines in the image, and the address lines are analyzed to determine a second destination code. The mail piece is sorted according to the second destination code, or a result determined by arbitrating the first and second destination codes.